Chapter 13

Dwellings of the Mossi Chiefs

342 554 787 We have seen, in an earlier chapter under "Labor Duties and Obligations of Mossi Subjects to their Chiefs," how the dwelling of the naba is built and repaired. We know also that the naba like all his subjects, consults a soothsayer to select the site for his dwelling. He needs to know whether he should keep his father's establishment, build a new one on the site of his grandfather's home, or finally, if the spirits are not favorable, whether he might build on unoccupied land.

342 554 The establishment of a naba differed from those of his subjects in former times in the great number of huts included within it. Also, there was an empty ostrich egg on the roof of each hut.

The sketch which follows shows the home of a naba before the arrival of the French. Such houses exist even today in certain areas.

There were no native houses with terraces or clay roofs. To be sure, the Mogho Naba had one, but although it was copied from the Djenné style, [214] it had, aside from a few doors and tiny windows, only a single opening in the ceiling the size of a canari. This was supposed to admit air to the inhabitants, and it was blocked up during the winter.

The Ouidi Naba (first minister) and the Kamsaongo Naba (chief eunuch) also had tata, but they were smaller. The former kept the sacred water (nam-tibo) and the latter the wealth of his master, the emperor.

342 177 A description of the typical dwelling of the Moaga will be given later. At present, especially since the installation of the [French] government at Ouagadougou, virtually all of the province and canton chiefs have dwellings more or less of the European type. The present tata of the Mogho Naba, the Baloum Naba, and the Ouidi Naba at Ouagadougou, those of the Konkistenga Naba at Imasshoro and at Zoétigomdé, and that of the Lallé Naba at Koudougou -- to mention only the principal ones -- prove that real progress has been made in housing by the Mossi chiefs.

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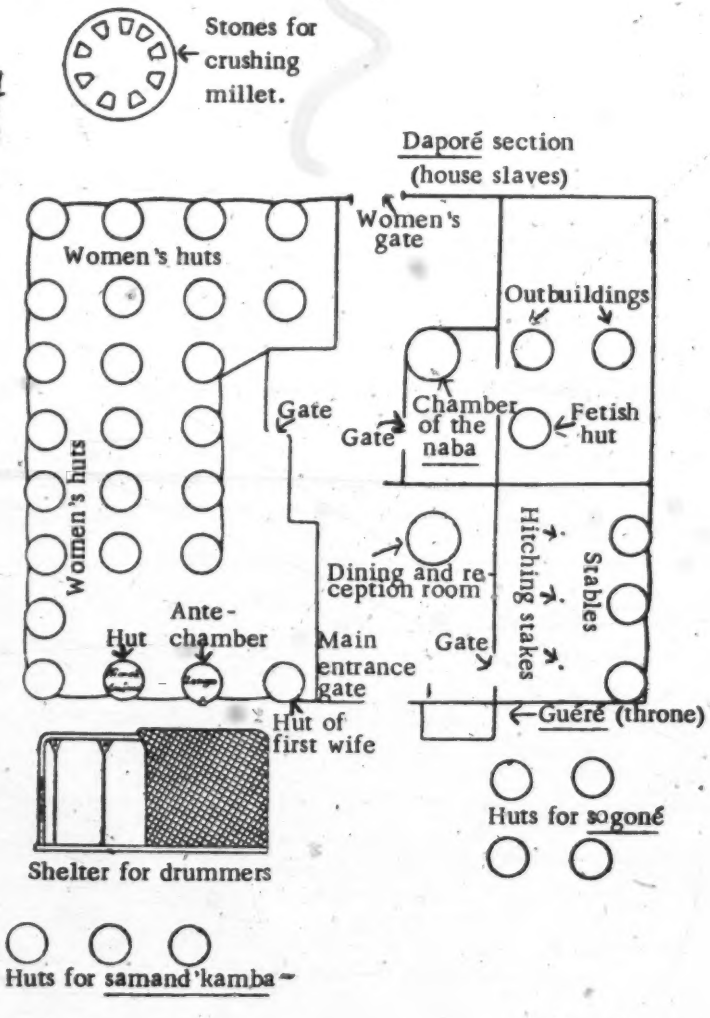

Dwelling of the Naba.

342 177 Of course, like all European houses in the region under discussion, these buildings are, unfortunately, made of mud bricks, but is that not the rule in French West Africa?

342 In the homes of those two ministers of the emperor who are most advanced, the reception rooms are arranged in such a way that callers benefit from a constant flow of fresh air through large openings. During periods of extreme heat, a punkah operated [417] by a sogoné in the middle [216] of the room provides air for the panting visitors. The wall, always whitewashed with kaolin, bears an [353] an advertisement or two, the picture of an important chief, or perhaps some family photographs, which enliven the apartments a bit. All of this shows a real anxiety on the part of the chiefs to develop along the lines of progress and civilization.

In recent years, some of the notables at Ouagadougou have built houses with clay roofs, not so much to live in as to safeguard their family valuables against fire and theft.

Finally, it should be noted that custom requires every new naba for the first three years of his reign to live in songodo, straw huts, which will be described later. Only then may he build with clay.

Dwellings of Mossi Subjects

342 787 Temporary dwelling. Before building his conjugal hut, the young man consults a soothsayer in order to make sure that the site chosen is not haunted by evil spirits and that he will have happiness and good fortune if he lives there.

342 787 Even if the soothsayer finds nothing especially alarming about the site, he always orders a chicken or other animal to be sacrificed or alms to be given. The young man arranges with the village elder [217] or, if he is a [Nioniosse], with the Tingsoba (from tenga "earth," and soba, "master"), to sacrifice the victim.

The Tingsoba goes to the site and calls for two small gourds which contain ordinary water and water mixed with flour, respectively. He invokes all his ancestors and pours the water on the ground, praying God to accept it for His wife, Tinga, who is absorbing it. Then he kills the chicken, saying: "On -- on,

342 782 mamé ka koud'ti y a niesmé yé ya saramb' boumbou, yaramb' boumbou, ti oua ta mamé" (which means something to this effect, "Accept the offering which I present in the name of X.... He appealed to me because I am the Tingsoba of the village. I do not consider myself to be more able than the other villagers, but this ceremony is a matter concerning our ancestors and I inherited the position from my predecessors").

The chicken is held with its feet up and head down, so that the blood mixes with the water having flour in it, and then it is thrown a short distance away. If the offering is accepted, the victim will fall on its back. Then it is hastily picked up, and a few feathers are pulled out and stuck into the slightly coagulated blood.

The chicken is given to the children to be plucked and roasted on the fire without salt or pepper. A leg is offered to the Tingsoba, and the rest of the meat is eaten by the family of the young man.

Part of the liver (saonré), however, is thrown onto the place of the sacrifice and thus offered to the spirits, [218] the invisible inhabitants of the place, so they will look favorably on the new household and help the couple to have children.

It should be noted that the Tingsoba may turn in any direction to make the sacrifice since no particular orientation is required.

342 A young husband's temporary dwelling is a simple straw hut made of the branches of a tree called randega. The branches are stuck into the ground, tied together at the top, walled around the base with Mossi mats (sougzakpinri), and roofed with thatch.

Permanent dwelling. After a year in the temporary dwelling the young man starts to build his permanent home if his means allow it. This is a group of clay huts, joined to each other by more or less even walls.

The earth must first be dug up, and the soil removed from the excavation must be dampened and molded into balls of mortar. A circle is laid out on the site by means of a string tied to a central stake. The foundation is built to a depth of about twenty centimeters. Mortar is put on the foundation, and construction of the walls is begun. These are always circular in form, and their dimensions vary. The mortar is allowed to dry before the work

342 is continued, and the process goes on until the hut is completed, that is, when it reaches a height of about 1.65 meters. The house is built without any openings, but when the walls are up, a [219] low door is put in, having the shape of a pointed arch. The interior of many Mossi houses is divided by a low wall, called kogré, which makes the hut very dark. A few small holes are made with the handle of a daba, and these, with the low door, are [726] the only openings. In time of war, the Moaga used to shoot his arrows through these tiny holes. Before the roof is put on, the [751] walls are daubed with wet ashes, a practice which is supposed to guarantee good health for the new inhabitants.

The roof is conical in shape. It is made with poles which are tightly tied at the top with vines. Stiff mats, zarsé, are placed on the poles. They are held in place with fibers and are covered with braided straw. Some twenty persons are needed to put up the roof. The construction of the house is then finished. Only the plastering remains to be done. For this job, the women collect a special kind of earth, boalga, which they mix with manure from cows or horses and then coat the walls with it. When this operation is completed, the women cover the floor with a ferruginous material that is sprinkled with water and tamped down with bits of flat wood called silpama. After the floor has been smoothed down, the sasgo is the next step. This involves covering the surface with a sticky material, boudou, mixed with ground charcoal. This is rubbed over and over with glass sherds or special stones called sassega. The shiny black surface obtained in this fashion prevents the ferruginous material from soiling the family's clothes. Some [824] people sprinkle the finished floor with kanmé, an infusion made of the skin of the néré fruit, in order to make it wear well.

[220] Construction workers. The master of the house is aided by his own brothers and other relatives in the same clan. He does not request help from outsiders. The women's job is to get the water needed for the mortar.

The earth used in building is taken from a hole near the house, the tan-nako (from tando, "earth," and nako, "hole"). This excavation is later filled with all the waste from the house and ordure from the courtyard. The tan-nako, well fertilized in this manner is planted with maize, and this field is called the kamanga.

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412 Tools. The only tools used are the sitoiga (native pickaxe) and the wanka (hoe).

352 House furnishings. (a) The man's hut. The only furnishings in a man's hut are a mat or thin secco, a bolster made of cotton strips or kapok, a quiver, the club, some arrows, the bow, a large knife (zangoégo), and a spear. Small bags of charms and other amulets hang from the wall here and there, and there is a sort of oval straw basket, pilgou, in which clothing is stored.

(b) The woman's hut. From one end of the hut to the other there are billi, small pieces of wood fastened to the wall to hold gourds, bowls (lensé), earthenware basins (lassé), ladles (soutissi), etc.

In the rear of the room lumps of dried earth, [221] hollowed in the center, hold the vessels, and pots, dougdo, which serve both as storage bins for clothing and as granaries for the produce of the woman's own garden.

592 Plan of a compound. As one enters a compound, the huts to left are those of the women and the master's huts stand to the right. Completely outside the establishment, there are one or two straw huts, similar to those already described, which provide sleeping quarters for the dakompa (young men).

[585] The head of the establishment lives alone. It could hardly be otherwise, since he summons his wives in turn.

The women live with their young children or with girls betrothed to their husband, until, of course, these girls receive huts of their own.

343 Kitchen arrangements. It is exceedingly rare among the Mossi to find a hut used specifically for cooking. The wife's bedroom serves also as a kitchen.

592 595 252 Ordinarily the husband issues provisions to the wife who is cooking for the family, but there are exceptions to this rule. At Ouagadougou, for example, most of the wives provide the food for the husband. The latter furnishes provisions only during the winter when the fields are being worked.

[222] The wives take turns preparing the food. The woman on duty is aided by her co-wives in grinding the millet on the millstone (néré) of the section, but she alone prepares the millet cake, sagbo.

1: Delobsom--160 I-5 (no date) 1933 FA28 Mossi FA28

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The Home of the Gounga Naba.

From the Mission of the White Fathers at Ouagadougou.

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The Cliffs of Bandiagara (Sudan).

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Entering the Bush.

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Above: A Baobab. IX

Below: Mossi Village.

361 /10/ The appearance of the villages indicates that their inhabitants feel safe. There are none of those hut clusters bunched together in [171] narrow walled-in areas to withstand the invasions of an El-hadj-Omar or of a Samory, as in Bambara country; none of those family groupings of flat-roofed huts, those strongholds sheltering the whole family from the grandfather to the last of his grandchildren to resist through sheer numbers the incursions of a more powerful neighbor, as in Gourounsi [592] country where the authority of chiefs is so weak. Here every family head, that is, a man with his wives, his unmarried children, and his servants, occupies a certain number of huts that together form his yri, a grouping Europeans call by its Bambara name, soukala.

342 The huts are circular and usually built of mud, but sometimes of 333 stakes driven into the ground and surrounded with séko, a kind of mat of plaited broad straw. The huts are surmounted with a roof, likewise of straw, resting on a wooden framework. When a native wishes to build a hut, he sets a date with a mason expert in laying mud bricks and notifies the village people. On the appointed day everyone comes to him. The women fetch water from the stream; the men excavate the soil a few meters from where the hut is to be erected; the children trample the mortar and carry to the mason the clods prepared by the old men who sit gravely around the mud pile. This is a festive occasion for the village, because the man who builds must supply drink for all, and food as well if he wishes to do things properly.

A circle is traced on the ground to indicate the outline of the hut, and the mason places the mud clods obliquely side by side along the circle. When the first round is finished, he starts another, and he proceeds in this fashion to mid-height. The work is then interrupted until the following day to give the first part a chance to dry. This is why several huts are usually built at the same time. No opening is left in the wall. When it is dry, a door is cut through, usually arched and so low that one must creep on hands and knees in order to get in. Well-to-do women close their hut with a wooden [414] door that opens inward; it is equipped with a wooden latch that works by means of a large key made of a stick with small iron rods perpendicularly attached to it. The children and even the husband usually leave their clothing, their luxury items, and their cowries in these closed huts which are better protected against thieves. Those who cannot afford this luxury of a door drive two stakes into the ground, one on each side of the opening, and slip a mat between the stakes and the wall.

592 A typical soukala consists of the master's hut, a hut for each wife, one hut for the sheep and goats, another for the horse if he has one, a hut for the family mill, and, finally, a receiving hut with two doors sufficiently high to permit entrance without stooping and set sometimes as an entrance way and sometimes within the cluster of huts. All these dwellings stand in a circle and are joined either by a cob wall or by /11/ mat fences taller than a man and held up by stakes. The master's hut, which usually stands beside the huts for the horses and sheep, is set off from the others by mats to insure his privacy. A low wall describes an arc within the inner courtyard; this is the kitchen when it is not raining. Big jars of fired clay which are used to brew millet beer rest between the huts. In front of this cluster of huts, a shelter is built, usually high enough to permit standing and consisting basically of forked stakes with branches and séko resting upon them; this shelter serves as a refuge during the hot part of the day. Small boys and unmarried girls live with their mother, while older boys, servants, and slaves each have their separate huts which face the dwellings of the master and his wives.

The term yri or soukala covers this whole complex of structures. Each soukala is a distinct unit, and, some time after they marry, the children build their own residence, set completely apart from that of their parents, often in another part of the village and sometimes in another village altogether. The soukala stand fifteen to twenty meters apart, and, because of this, the villages, though adequately concentrated, cover a rather extensive area. The heads of cantons place an ostrich egg at the peak of the roof on their own dwellings, and some even build terraced huts higher than the surrounding dwellings. They keep their riches in these huts and a prison in the basement. An earthen stairway leads to the terrace where the master of the house receives his guests when the sun begins to sink on the horizon.

721 These people, apparently so peaceful today, were formerly quite warlike and went off to war at the slightest pretext. Foreign to the land they now occupy, the Mossi must have conquered it by force of arms. The Tarik-es-Soudan /History of Sudan/ relates that the people of Yatenga seized Timbuktu in the fourteenth century, and in the fifteenth they probably carried their incursions as far as Lake Bébo and even Oualata. (4) The Mossi army was greatly feared.

4. Delafosse, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 80.

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A Mossi Province Chief.

The Moro Naba of the Mossi.

2:Mangin--19a M-5 (ca. 1910) 1921 FA28 Mossi FA28

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Above: A Naba and his Men.
Below: Mossi Elders.

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The Large Mossi Drums.

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Dance of Young Mossi Girls.

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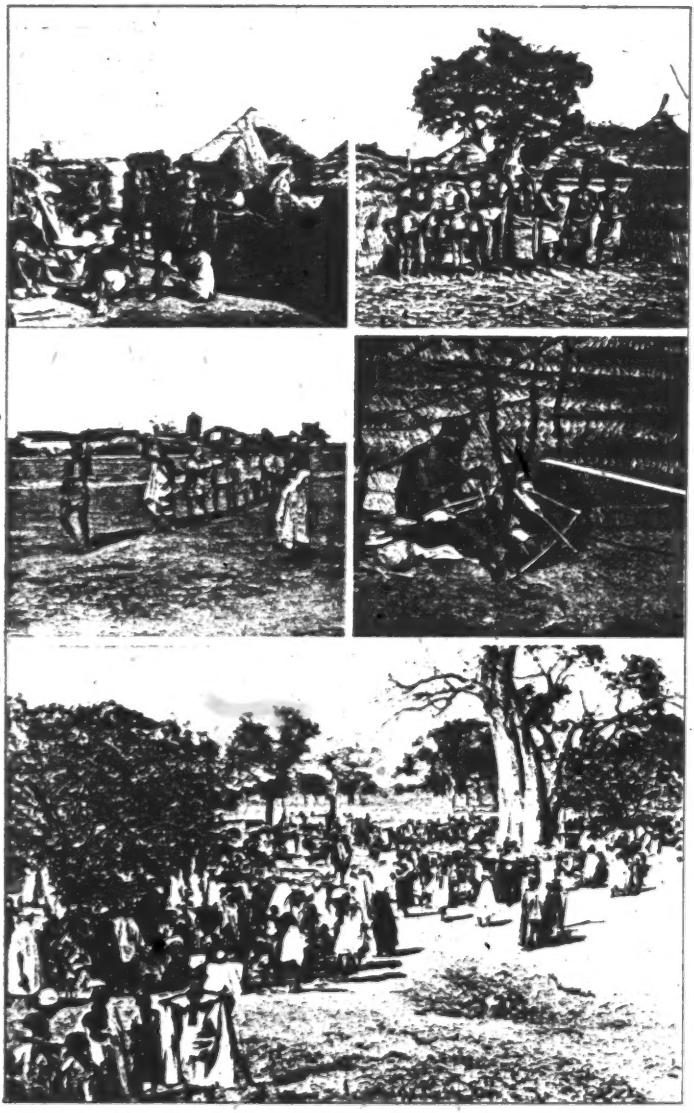

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Above: Inside a Soukala. Above: The Occupants of a Soukala.
Middle: Load-bearers. Middle: Weaver.
Below: Marketplace.

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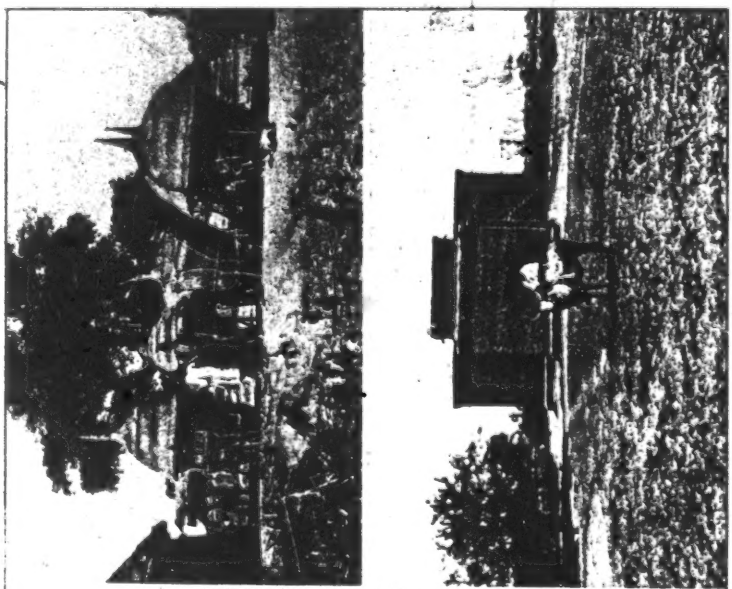

Above: Millet Granaries.
Below: Riding an Ox.

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Above: Cooking Sarabo.
Below: Outdoor Kitchen.

5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
FA28 Mossi FA28

the ancestral spirits, he is the principal political and religious authority within his lineage.

The single term *boodoo* is used to refer to three separate groups: the sib, the lineage, and the local residential kin group described above. Aside from formalized recognition of patrilineal descent and inheritance, the lineage functions most significantly as a local residential kin group in which the economic and social participation of the female non-members is as important as that of the men. Although the men are most prominent in the direction of its affairs, their wives have a considerable, if somewhat indirect, effect upon decisions made. Even in the relationship of the members of the lineage to their ancestral spirits (*kiemse*), the women play an important part in preparing the food and the libations to be offered. They give birth to the members of the lineage, nourish them until weaning (usually at the age of two), and provide them with guidance and training for their ascribed roles. In the education of the female members of the lineage the wives play a more important part than the men. But it is in their economic activities that the significance of the women's role is best seen. In addition to their farm work, they co-operate fully in repairing roofs, flooring the courtyards, and even assisting in the brick-making which precedes house-building. The economic and social contribution of the wives is of equal importance with that of the husbands and sons, and it is more important than that of the daughters, since females born into the lineage marry and leave just as they become fully productive members of their fathers' households.

Daughters, however, serve their lineage in a different way. As they are successful in winning for themselves a good name in the households of their husbands, so the bond of economic and social co-operation established between the two lineages at the time of marriage is strengthened. When they mature, they return to assist the members of their lineage with ritual obligations to the ancestors. If they are left childless at their husband's death, they may return to their father's household to reside.

Separated from one another by millet fields and the public way, the dwelling of each Mossi kin group has the appearance of a small walled village. Each round mud house with its thatched roof has a separate courtyard which is usually contiguous to the courtyards of the other houses in the residential unit of which it is a part. The individual dwellings are constructed in such a way—the wall of each house or courtyard being contiguous to that of the nearest neighbor—as to form a circular wall whose exterior is closed at all but two points. The dwelling of each kin group has a small exit and a large open entrance way just within which is located a thatch-covered sun shelter (*zande*) where the men of the lineage gather to rest, to work at small crafts, and to talk. Guests are

342 592 [264] received, gossip exchanged, and social and ceremonial obligations discussed in its shade. Here also, the men of the lineage take their meals, brought out to them from the kitchens of their wives and set before them by their sons, who first attend their fathers and then dine on what remains.

592 252 [512] A few paces away is the grinding platform (*nere*) where the women gather to prepare the grain for their families' meals. This great circular mud table, some twenty feet in diameter, is raised about three feet from the ground. Its surface is beaten hard and worked over with cinders and manure to make it rainproof. Each woman has her assigned place at this platform where she keeps her pestle and where she stations herself at dawn and again at dusk to grind her millet and learn the news of the day.

592 Frequently found at the outer perimeter of the dwelling of the Mossi kin group is the house of the son of a lineage woman who has returned from his father's household to live in the benevolent presence of his mother's family, with whom he enjoys an especially permissive relationship. The house set aside for the residence of the young unmarried men of the lineage is also located on the outer edge of the compound dwelling.

555 184 A recent addition to the traditional pattern of village organization described above is the independent households of socially ambitious individuals who have chosen to separate themselves from the residences of their lineages in order to profit from their own economic or religious enterprises. Many have become independently wealthy through successful commercial ventures; others, as a result of conversion to Islam, have gained prestige through religious authority and wealth through the tuition and services provided by the Koranic students. Often these people are much younger than their lineage elders, not in line for the inheritance of political or religious authority through traditional channels, and unwilling either to accept the authority of their seniors or to share economically with the less prosperous members of their lineages. They are deviants, in conflict with the communal patterns of consumption and with the emphasis on accepting established authority which characterizes the traditional social organization of the Mossi.

THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

613 476 293 Much agricultural endeavor is necessarily co-operative. Each farmer is dependent on the assistance of his kinsmen to get his fields seeded, cultivated, and harvested in the short time during which each of these operations must take place. However, the yield from his field remains his own, to be shared only with his own wives and children. Members of the lineage also work in the fields under the specific control of the lineage elder. Although the harvest from these fields is stored in the granary

242 [i.e. at a sun shelter in the entrance-way. — Analyst]

304 notified, nor are the family heads. The women, girls, and other
881 boys (those who are not to be circumcised) cannot witness the operation, and this is actually forbidden to them. Circumcision is performed in the bush, 500 meters from the village, in the open air by the side of a tree. There is no location determined by custom, however, and a spot is chosen each year at will.

The man who is performing the operation ties the tip of the patient's prepuce with a string /259/, and the boy squats down. A small block of wood is placed under the penis, and the tip of the penis rests upon it. The man places a small iron cleaver on the spot marked by the string, and deals it a sharp, neat blow with a stone, so the blade will
[752] make a clean cut. Naturally, a copious hemorrhage ensues. It is first allowed to take its course for a while, and then the man stanches it by putting dust upon the wound. Each child is circumcised in turn. When the operations are over, the man who was chosen, the nané, leads the circumcised boys to another spot, 500 meters from the village, under a tree. He has the heads of the children's families notified (and they notify in turn the children's parents) that the boys have just been circumcised and beg forgiveness for having done this without telling them. Family heads, fathers, and mothers naturally forgive in accordance with custom. Meanwhile, the boys are taking care of themselves. By tying a string around the body, they lift the penis so its tip will not rub against the thighs. The string holds another cord which lifts the penis in a horizontal position. To maintain it in this position, they also place under the penis a little piece of forked wood, the tip of which rests on the testicles. They do not dress the wounds as yet. This will not be done until three days have passed.

304 Meanwhile, the men of the circumcised boys' compounds build
342 two sheds in Mossi style (low, on forks, with a thick straw roof), one
881 outside the village where the young men are, the other inside the village in front of the compound of the nané. Food for the circumcised boys is provided by their families. Each mother makes sarabou for her son, but the mothers do not bring it themselves, for, being women, they are not permitted to see the newly-circumcised boys. They send the sarabou through some boy who has already been circumcised. In the evening when it is quite dark, around seven o'clock, the nané brings the children to sleep under the shed erected in the village. Before daybreak in the morning they will, like shadows, leave again for the bush.

513 The Mogho Naba slept in a grass hut in the palace
36 compound. Two
643 KINGSHIP AND CHIEFSHIP

[342] reasons are given for the choice of a grass hut over a brick building: first, the grass hut was considered better protection against sorcerers, who were [754] believed to induce storms that destroy buildings and their occupants; second, it was believed that the ruler's ancestors preferred to visit grass huts [775] because it was easier for them to enter through the interstices in the walls. [644] When the monarch retired for the night, one of his pages stood guard at the door. The Mogho Naba usually slept all night, but he occasionally made the rounds with a page to check on the palace guards or the safety (and virtue) of his wives.

643 The routine of the Mogho Naba seldom varied. Only in times of danger [644] or on great ceremonial occasions did protocol permit any major changes in court procedure. Normally, pages, ministers, and other court officials adhered very strictly to their traditional tasks.

The Mossi considered the king's office to be such a difficult one that even today they say, *Mogho Naba toumde ya yida ja* ("The Mogho Naba's task is the most difficult of all"). Nevertheless, the Mogho Naba's office was always eagerly sought, and considerable care had to be exercised to [645] ensure that the right person was chosen. As soon as the incumbent Mogho Naba died, and even before he was buried, the Ouidi Naba, as prime minister, began the consultations leading to the selection of a new monarch. Mossi custom decreed that the eldest son of a previous ruler be chosen as the new Mogho Naba. This choice was not automatic, however, in view of the primary consideration that the person selected should have the skill to "keep" the country. Other qualifications for office were membership in the royal minimal lineage, soundness of body and mind, and sufficient age to command universal respect. Given these requirements and the lack of any provisions for a regency, it is not surprising that a dead ruler's sons, brothers, uncles, and even grandchildren—that is, his entire babissi—should have competed to "eat the nam" (accede to power).[13] Of the thirty-four kings who have ruled since Oubri, the founder of the Ouagadougou dynasty, twelve succeeded their brothers and twenty-two their fathers. Interestingly enough, there is some indication that at the beginning of the Ouagadougou dynasty, the successor of a king was usually chosen from among his brothers before the nam was passed on to the next generation.[14] For example, Oubri's four sons all reigned in turn before the kingship descended to the son of the last brother in office. Then, two of this brother's sons reigned before the nam descended to a new generation. Initially, then, seniority within the royal lineage, like seniority within the local ruling lineages, may have been determined by generation. On the other hand, accidental factors may have governed: a weak state organization may have

11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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fied his sexual desires. Since these women were in the monarch's favor, they were better dressed than the other wives and received more attention from him. The dogunba generally cultivated a large field in common with the aid of the palace retainers, but some insisted on cultivating their own fields instead. Like the other wives, the dogunba usually lived in huts of their own. Childless women sometimes shared the same hut until one of them became pregnant and had to set up a hut for herself and her child.

Those wives who lived in special villages under the supervision of eunuchs rarely went to the palace. Usually, they were past childbearing age or had lost favor with the monarch. They cultivated plots of land, spun cotton, and prepared locust-bean flour, locust-bean "balls," and shea butter. They kept a part of the produce for their own use and sent the remainder to the palace stores; the same arrangement obtained for all three categories of palace wives.

The Mogho Naba's heir was usually born while his father was still Crown Prince. He was never born in his father's compound because, unlike other Mossi women, the wife of a Mogho Naba or Crown Prince returned to her father's house for confinement. As soon as she announced her pregnancy, the Pughtiema or one of the older wives held a ceremony to notify the ancestors. Once the rite had been completed, the wife was sent to her relatives for fear that she might be harmed by her less fortunate co-wives. If the child was a boy, the ruler or Crown Prince was notified immediately, because the important privileges of a first-born hinged upon this notification. Since several wives of the Mogho Naba might be pregnant at the same time and errors might be made about the onset and duration of pregnancy, primogeniture had to be established immediately to forestall dynastic conflicts. For example, it is commonly believed that the present Doulougou Naba was born several days before Mogho Naba Sagha II (1942–57) but was deprived of the nam because the messenger who brought news of his birth reached Mogho Naba Kom after the messenger who announced Sagha's birth. Undoubtedly, such allegations were sometimes used to foster and support dynastic rebellions.

So strong was the fear that the most likely heir to the nam would be harmed by jealous co-wives that the child and his mother never returned to the palace except for brief visits on ceremonial occasions. The young prince remained with his mother's relatives and was guarded and educated by servants sent from the palace. If his father was on the throne at Ouagadougou when the boy reached the age of ten, he was formally installed as chief of Djiba district, the traditional seat of the Crown Prince. If his father was not on the throne, the boy remained with his mother's relatives and went to Djiba when his grandfather died and his father was installed as Mogho Naba.

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Visitors to the court of Moghho Nâba Sanem salute him in the traditional Mossi manner.
From Louis Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée par le pays Kong et le Mossi, 1887–1889* (Paris, 1892).

[p. 178 - A]